

# *Speckdänischer* Positivism. Svend Ranulf on Ethos and Propaganda

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## ABSTRACT

*In this contribution we deal with the sociological positivism of Danish philosopher and sociologist Svend Ranulf (1894-1953). Next to his major writings, this paper considers some of Ranulf's minor works, in order to shed light on some controversial aspects of his thought. This paper focuses, in particular, on the meaning of the notions of ethos and propaganda in Ranulf's epistemology, in order to re-evaluate his late studies on democracy and political communication, with special attention given to the early post-war continental debate on propaganda.*

## 1. SVEND RANULF: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Danish sociologist Svend Ranulf (1894-1953) is widely known for his treatise on *Moral indignation and Middle Class psychology* (1938) where he seeks to prove that a certain «disinterested tendency or disposition to inflict punishment» is characteristic of the Middle Class. However, is quite less known that Ranulf tried to apply this concept to the study of propaganda. In this contribution we intend to consider some of his little-known writings, including his late works on propaganda. The reasons why these writings deserve attention are more than one: first, because Ranulf's works are one of the first attempts to analyze propaganda in Europe, after World War II; second, because Ranulf's works on propaganda and on epistemology of sociology have been heavily criticized, and third, because

a cross-analysis of those writings allows us to shed new light on Ranulf's hard-boiled positivism.

As a seminary graduate, Ranulf first started with Greek philosophy as his specialty. He obtained his doctorate on the dissertation *Der eleatische Satz vom Widerspruch* (1924), where he had taken into consideration certain aporetic aspects of Plato's youth dialogues. His main work in this period, though, which marks his decisive move into the sociology of morals and law, is the three-volume *The jealousy of the Gods and criminal law at Athens. A contribution to the sociology of moral indignation* (1933-34). Here Ranulf would find the first occurrence of what he called a «disinterested» tendency to punishment, since he discovered that, in ancient Greek society, private revenge was gradually and ritually replaced through the public involvement of the community. Against the idea that criminal law emerged to fulfil a purely rational social need, Ranulf calls into question this disinterested tendency, motivated by a widespread feeling of moral indignation, which was based on envy. In particular, this envy was projected into the gods, as if the unjustified punishment (a «misfortune») could be interpreted as divine envy towards human behaviour<sup>1</sup>.

Even at this stage, Ranulf made no secret of his adherence to the positivism of Comte and Durkheim, despite some of their alleged methodological shortcomings. In the wake of these authors, he had embarked on the construction of a “scientific” and “quantitative” method. As a positivist, Ranulf was fairly disappointed when the German emigrant Theodor Geiger was preferred to him for a professorship in sociology at Aarhus University in 1938<sup>2</sup>. In Geiger, Ranulf saw a representative of the «sociology of *Wesensschau*», full of “metaphysical” assumptions as introspection, qualitative data or interpretation. Geiger would have been somehow intellectually conniving with the irrational drift that led to Nazism. As can be hinted from the gravity of such an assumption, we will have to return on this.

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<sup>1</sup> Another important work of those years, especially with regard to the delineation of Ranulf's own method, is *Moralen og Samfundet* (1927).

<sup>2</sup> In 1946 Ranulf published a first volume on the methodology of the social sciences (*Socialvidenskabelig Methodelære*), indulging, for the most part, in an unprejudiced and often inaccurate critique of Geiger. This was also followed by a harsh response from Geiger himself, known as *Ranulf contra Geiger: Et angreb og et offensivt forsvar* (1946). A second handbook of methodology for the social sciences (*Methods of Sociology. With an Essay: Remarks on the Epistemology of Sociology*), written in 1939, was published posthumously in 1955. The contents of this volume should then have been expanded and revised for the 1946 work. As regards Geiger, he was indeed unwilling to exclude the possibility of using introspection for certain analytical purposes but demanded that the researcher should keep his data and values separate in his analysis, nevertheless asserting that the selection of a problem for study always included an element of value. On Geiger see, at least, T. Agersnap, *Theodor Geiger: pioneer of sociology in Denmark*, in: «Acta Sociologica», n. 43, 2000, pp. 325-330.

The same year of the Aarhus call for the sociology chair, Ranulf published *Moral indignation and Middle Class psychology. A sociological study*<sup>3</sup> (1938), which has to be understood as his major accomplishment. Along the lines of *The Jealousy of Gods*, with an eye on German studies on «*ressentiment*»<sup>4</sup>, Ranulf attempts to define the fundamental sentiment of the bourgeois class, through a strictly quantitative method. According to Ranulf the (petty) bourgeoisie is characterised by the social phenomenon of moral indignation, i.e. outrage for the non-observance of moral commands or prohibitions. In other words, the bourgeoisie would be characterised by a moral rigorism, which takes prohibitions seriously and is indignant if commands and prohibitions are not observed. A more rigorous morality would thus take the place of a looser one, without the moral content changing in the process, or at least without a new moral content replacing the old one. The culmination of this moral rigorism is the development of a «disinterested tendency or disposition to inflict punishment».

After World War II, Ranulf turned his attention to the subject of propaganda, on which he wrote extensively, publishing two major studies in the series *Acta Jutlandica*, articles, and reviews. The first we mention is *Hitler's Kampf gegen die Objektivität*<sup>5</sup>. It analyzes Hitler's main writings and speeches, trying to show how he justifies or condemns the same action, depending on who performs it. For example, Hitler complains of terror when used by his enemies, but justifies terror by Nazis and Germans. He condemns disrespect for authority on the part of his opponents, while inciting disregard for certain authorities among his followers. Ranulf ascribes these ambiguities to various forms of fascism, seeking to show how this is far less prominent in Churchill's war speeches. The second work we analyze is *On the survival chances of democracy*<sup>6</sup>. Here Ranulf considers the resistance movement against Nazism as a social phenomenon, concluding that it has appealed to the same moral indignation Nazism used for its horrific aims. The verbal and material violence that the resistance movement opposed to Nazism appears to be both the salvation and the conviction of democracy, since this attitude is constantly at risk of degenerating into a form of authoritarianism. As can be expected, this aspect will also be the subject of our discussion.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ranulf, *Moral indignation and Middle Class psychology: a sociological study*, København, Levin & Munksgaard 1938.

<sup>4</sup> On this matter see, at least, F.S. Festa, *Das ressentiment. Da Nietzsche a Scheler: quale edificazione della morale?*, Roma, Castelvecchi, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> S. Ranulf, *Hitler's Kampf gegen die Objektivität*, Acta Jutlandica, København, Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946.

<sup>6</sup> S. Ranulf, *On the Survival Chances of Democracy*, Acta Jutlandica, København, Ejnar Munksgaard, 1948.

## 2. RANULF'S «PURE EMPIRICISM» AND ITS ENEMIES: FIRST PART

In a 1947 review, Harold Laswell described Ranulf's work on Hitler's propaganda as «one of the most suggestive studies of political communication that has been made by a European or American scholar»<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, besides the compliments, Laswell noted that Ranulf's classificatory method was not completely satisfying on the grounds of the modes he chose to classify Hitler's speech statements. Together with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's statements elsewhere, Ranulf thought that another reliable source could be the «common knowledge of Nazi practices». According to Lasswell, the first two are unobjectionable, but the last is «of dubious value». “Common knowledge” appears indeed to be a vague concept, «open to the free play of the reader/classifier's bias». What appears to be an oversight, probably conditioned by a naive empiricism, conceals a more complex worldview.

It would be therefore worth examining Ranulf's methodological proposal in greater depth. To achieve this end, we have considered appropriate to sound out Ranulf's “minor” production, with explicit reference to a series of reviews and discussions in which Ranulf is either directly called into question or forced to draw distinctions between the position he analyzes and the one he professes. In the first place, it is of exceptional interest the polite *querelle* that took place, in the well-known Swedish journal *Theoria*, between the old Ranulf and the young Swedish sociologist Bertil Pfannenstill (1909-1995). The dispute between the two began with an initial contribution by Pfannenstill, titled *Method and object in Sociology*<sup>8</sup>. In this text the author takes Ranulf as the representative of a positivistic theory of knowledge in the field of sociology. Therefore, Pfannenstill starts criticizing Ranulf's approach as an attempt to conceive sociology from a positivistic point of view. Ranulf is reproached for his use of «protocol statements», since they appear to be based on certain «pure sensations» that would guarantee the objectivity of judgement. Since it is not possible to postulate such immediate or pure elements in sociology, it is equally impossible to refer to protocol statements. However, since Ranulf considers sociology to be as exact a science as physics, he has had to introduce “quantitative” expressions to serve as protocol statements.

The main example comes from *Moral indignation and Middle Class psychology*<sup>9</sup>, where Ranulf created a quantitative expression for the Puritan mentality in England during a certain period, with the aim of measure the moral

<sup>7</sup> H. Laswell, *Svend Ranulf, Hitler's Kampf gegen die Objektivität, Universitetsforlaget, I Aarhus, Ejnar Munksgaard, København, 1946*, in: «Public Opinion Quarterly», Summer 1947, p. 274.

<sup>8</sup> B. Pfannenstill, *Method and object in Sociology*, in: «Theoria», n. 8 (1), 1942, pp. 23-57.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ranulf, *Moral indignation and Middle Class psychology*, cit.

indignation of this category in a given time. Ranulf counted the number of words which are contained in selected literature, and which are expressions of such feeling and attitudes as characterize the Puritans. The numerical results are then considered to provide the same exact index to the emotional intensity of the Puritan mentality «as thermometer reading to temperature sensations»<sup>10</sup>. But Pfannenstill observes that if physics has to be our guiding-subject even in sociology, we must note that physics do not occupy itself with temperature sensations of the individual, and so sociology should not enter upon a treatment of the individual's feelings and attitudes. Pfannenstill concedes that Ranulf's view, like that of many other positivists, can find refuge in behaviourism as far as the explanation of psychological facts is concerned, and consequently moves on.

Pfannenstill now asks: in what relation should a social object, for instance the "Middle Class", be placed to obtain a serviceable concept for sociology? The author clarified that we cannot rest satisfied with merely giving the characteristics of the Middle Class as conceived in everyday thought, as Ranulf seems to do, since any determination of the concept would be ambiguous. Nor a description of the object in question is adequate, since it would mean that we identify sociological and historical concepts. Then Pfannenstill considers the possibility of an "economical" definition of Middle Class, as a certain «income group». Again, though, it is not acceptable to identify sociological concepts with statistical or political-economical concepts, since this kind of concepts aim to classify individuals, not the "Middle Class".

Despite the fact that Ranulf implies both statistical, historical and common-knowledge concepts to define the Middle Class, Pfannenstill declares that the complete definition of Ranulf's Middle Class appears to be sociologically acceptable. To understand why, we have to specify that, according to Pfannenstill, sociology is «*the science of ethos*»<sup>11</sup>. Ranulf's definition of Middle Class results in a sociological concept because he determines the middle class by its ethos, which is its disposition for moral indignation. Only this ethos-oriented sociology can produce sociologically acceptable concepts, since «a fact is not an object for sociology until it can be put into relation with another social object»<sup>12</sup>. Eventually, to escape the accusation of proposing 'metaphysical' concepts, Pfannenstill specifies that the ethos concept must be determined operationally, i.e. it must be determined by way of the corresponding sociological operations, and then especially by way of those employed in the attempt to control a course of social events by

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<sup>10</sup> B. Pfannenstill, *Method and object in Sociology*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

the application of this concept. Any control of this kind can only take place within the boundaries of both a given «social field», where the biological, psychological and social forces can be placed in relation to one another without depriving them of their distinctive characters, and of a given «group ethos», where historical facts become an object for sociology, through the value they are related to.

To summarize: trying to view sociology through a physicalist standpoint, Ranulf approaches social objects through a bunch of “common concepts”, on which he built a quantitative method of analysis. Nonetheless, Pfannenstill tried to show that those common concepts are not sociologically functional by themselves, by intervention of other social sciences, such as history or statistics, or by virtue of Ranulf quantitative method. Those concepts are inadvertently placed by Ranulf in a ethos-oriented sociology, which granted him sociological acceptability.

### 3. RANULF'S «PURE EMPIRICISM» AND ITS ENEMIES: SECOND PART

Ranulf responded with a small contribution, also published in *Theoria*, in which he tried to reduce Pfannenstill's ethos-sociology to a colourful reworking of his sociological physicalism<sup>13</sup>. First, Ranulf approves Pfannenstill criticism of the principle of protocol statements in as much as this principle rests on the assumption of «immediate and pure sensations», but he does not wish to reject protocol statements, since they can be considered as being founded on the same principles as operationally determined concepts and, most importantly, they appear to be «empirical means against the use of intuitions in sociology». Second, there are no essential differences between the definition Pfannenstill approves and the one he disapproves. If the Middle Class is defined as a class of people characterized by a disposition to moral indignation, it necessarily follows that those individuals, who are possessed of these characteristics, belong to the Middle Class, while others do not. In this sense, «every definition on the ground of ethos is necessarily at the same time a classification of individuals»<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, Ranulf cannot see any reason for assigning one kind of definition to sociology and another, for instance, to political economy or to statistics, since the demarcation of one scientific discipline from another is to be understood as purely conventional. Along the line of this assumption, he rehabilitates the use of a «ordinarily considered» «psychological understanding» in sociology, and then turns to the concept of ethos. According to Ranulf the concept of ethos cannot be a reliable source of meaning since it is not an end in itself. Nonetheless, its end appears to be identi-

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<sup>13</sup> S. Ranulf, *Positivism and Sociology*, in: «Theoria», n. 8 (3), 1942, pp. 277-280.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, p. 278.

cal with that of «positivistic sociology» so that he can declare himself in accordance with Pfannenstill.

Pfannenstill's answer will not be long in coming; indeed, we find it already on the next page of the same issue of *Theoria*<sup>15</sup>. On protocol statements, Pfannenstill asks how they could be empirical means against intuition, when the protocol statements appear to be founded on intuition, since «simple qualities cannot be argued, they can only be pointed out, and he who does not “understand” them, cannot either have them enter into the communication that is a necessary presupposition for objectivity»<sup>16</sup>. Secondly, on the idea that ethos-oriented definitions always call into questions individuals, Pfannenstill replies that Ranulf is here again using the term “classification” in an unscientific and everyday sense. To classify does not mean to range individuals under a scheme of classification; it means to merely determine that a complex of behaviour exists and has certain social results. In this sense, e.g. with regards to moral indignation, the product is what is taken into judgment, not the men themselves. Furthermore, even though Pfannenstill agrees that the demarcation between disciplines is conventional, he points out that other principles of differentiation, for instance statistics ones, do not «furnish any decisive criterion for a class determination from a sociological point of view»<sup>17</sup>. Thirdly, on the assumption that ethos is «a means to another end», he specifies that ethos is a means for another ethos, since ethos can be described as a complex of relations, which are not always in harmony with one another. Finally, he concludes that sociology has indeed very much in common with natural sciences, but there is also much that distinguishes them, and, on those differences, we cannot shut our eyes.

We will have to wait a couple of years to know the end of this clash. In the *Discussions* section of *Theoria*<sup>18</sup>, Ranulf will return to the issue, looking also at another recent publication by Pfannenstill, *Sociologiens grundförutsättningar* (1943). Although the focus of the question has changed slightly, due to the addition of this new volume, Ranulf seems to make two important concessions<sup>19</sup>. First, on protocol statements, Ranulf goes so far as to argue that it is true that

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<sup>15</sup> B. Pfannenstill, *Positivism and Sociology. Reply to Svend Ranulf*, in in «Theoria», n. 8 (3), 1942, pp. 280-285.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, p. 281.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 282.

<sup>18</sup> S. Ranulf, *A last note on Positivism and Sociology*, in «Theoria», n. 10 (1), 1944, pp. 54-55.

<sup>19</sup> There will also be a final remark by Pfannenstill, which, however, does not add much to the discussion. After establishing that Ranulf's can be seen as a «pure empiricism», while his as a «constructive empiricism», Pfannenstill will politely end the discussion, noting that there is no way to find a real common ground. Cfr. B. Pfannenstill, *Sociology, Positivism and Natural Science. A last reply to Svend Ranulf*, in in «Theoria», n. 10 (1), 1944, pp. 55-56.

they are based on intuition. This, however, is only true in the sense of a «practical intuition» which should convey those statements. The notion of «practical intuition» comes to Ranulf from the famous philosopher and psychologist H. Høffding, who defined «practical intuition» as follows: «this sort of intuition plays an essential role when man forms his own belief and conception of life. It is a spontaneous synthesis of experiences and observations»<sup>20</sup>. Secondly, Ranulf distances himself from classical positivism. These two specifications, together with Ranulf's desire to accord scientific reliability to common knowledge and introspection, give us a fairly clear picture of his positivism. In other words, it seems that within his quantitative method, precisely by means of the median and polyvocal use of common knowledge, Ranulf also intends to find room for the world of experience, especially for the world of inner experience and the world of cultural assumptions that affect each individual, without thereby placing himself in a value-oriented standpoint. For this reason, although his perspective closely resembles Pfannenstill's Sociology of ethos, the two are not exactly overlapping. According to this framework, Ranulf intends to look at inner experience and cultural inheritance as a psychological whole, cauterized by means of his rigid quantitative scheme, so as to avoid the value problem.

#### 4. RANULF ON GEMEINSCHAFT AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

We have thus understood in what sense Ranulf's sociology can be regarded as a sociology of ethos<sup>21</sup>. Let us now try to return to one of the most controversial points of his thought by means of this acquisition. Ranulf has been heavily criticised, often with reason, for his reception of some important French and German schools

<sup>20</sup> H. Høffding, *Modern Philosophers and Lectures on Bergson*, tr. by A.C. Manson, London, MacMillan and Co., 1915, p. 256.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Ranulf's statement in this review of J. Davidsohn's *Økonomisk Historieopfattelse* (1931): «Human consciousness is partly biological and partly social. There are few mental qualities (e.g. "instincts" or emotions) in respect of which it is for the moment impossible to determine whether they are innate or due to the influence of the society in which the individuals concerned live. But there are at any rate a number of emotions which may be seen to vary in degree from one society to another. [...] It seems possible, however, to find in the nature of the "higher culture" produced in a given society useful symptoms for measuring the intensity with which emotions of the kind referred to express themselves, at least in the social milieu which provides the audience for the "higher culture". One thus excludes oneself from a useful source of knowledge of these feelings, the varying intensity of which, however, undoubtedly affects many conditions of social life, if one wishes to study them in principle only in connection with the movements referred to by Dr. Davidsohn (S. Ranulf, *Økonomisk Historieopfattelse*, in «Nationaløkonomisk Tidsskrift», n. 40 (3), 1932, p. 82 (my translation). Moreover, Ranulf seems also to grant some title of veracity to the notion of «national character». See S. Ranulf, *Moral indignation and Middle Class psychology: a sociological study*, cit., p. 55ff.



of sociological thought<sup>22</sup>. His main argument against many distinguished names in continental sociology concerned the difference between the *Gemeinschaft* (the “face-to-face community”), which is said to be «a type of society characterized by the predominance of tradition, emotion, and instinct», and the *Gesellschaft* (the “market society”), which is said to be characterized «by the predominance of individualism and intellectualism», which means of rationality and science. Many sociologists are portrayed by Ranulf as somehow preferring the *Gemeinschaft* model to the *Gesellschaft*, without necessarily having anything in common other than this. On the basis of this tendency these sociologists are said to have fomented a certain irrationalism typical of the *Gemeinschaft*, on which fascism is said to have fed, since «indulgence in [...] deprecations of the *Gesellschaft* is equivalent to a piece of fascist propaganda unsupported by genuine science<sup>23</sup>».

A similar judgement befell the German refugee in Denmark Theodor Geiger. As we said, in 1946 Ranulf published a short polemical work on social scientific methods. About 100 pages of the 260-pages book can be seen as an attack against Geiger, not only criticising his methodological assumptions, but also implying that his approach – however unintentionally – supported Nazism. Ranulf will see nothing strange in associating his harsh accusations towards continental sociology with a Nazi-refugee, one year after the end of World War II. Nonetheless, beyond the reasons for the Ranulf-Geiger *querelle*, our aim would be to return on this dispute in the light of the findings so far. Indeed, bearing in mind the question of ethos in this dispute, we shall see in a new light a recurring accusation by Ranulf against Geiger, but also against Durkheim or Tönnies, who was the first to propose the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, leaning towards the first.

As Ranulf had to say many times, Geiger’s sociology is «based on traditional social-democratic thinking»<sup>24</sup>. This assumption recurs many times in Ranulf’s criticism of Geiger and other distinguished continental thinkers<sup>25</sup>. If we try to interpret this argument in the light of the importance that Ranulf seems to give to the question of ethos, we will see that the qualification of «social-democrat» represents a real “black beast”, as a “German-Continental”<sup>26</sup> socio-political con-

<sup>22</sup> A comprehensive and rather strong criticism of Ranulf’s following arguments can be found in D.N. Smith, *Collectivism and intellectuals. Svend Ranulf, Émile Durkheim, fascism, and resistance*, in «Antisemitism Studies», n. 1 (2), 2017, pp. 305-351.

<sup>23</sup> These accusations are mainly raised in S. Ranulf, *Scholarly forerunners of fascism*, in «Ethics», n. 50 (1), 1939, pp. 16-34 and *Two types of sociology*, in «Theoria», n. 6 (1), 1940, pp. 43-57.

<sup>24</sup> S. Ranulf, *Propaganda*, in «Theoria», n. 2 (3), 1936, p. 245.

<sup>25</sup> This is also the case, in a broader sense, with E. Durkheim, W. Sombart or K. Mannheim. See, on this, at least S. Ranulf, *Methods of Sociology etc.*, cit., pp. 20-32, 49-54 and 83-85.

<sup>26</sup> By Social Democracy Ranulf seems not to mean here Bernstein’s revisionism but the whole social-democratic movement with its currents. On this see, for example, S. Ranulf, *Økonomisk Historieopfattelse*, in «Nationaløkonomisk Tidsskrift», n. 40 (3), 1932, p. 75.

figuration of theoretical errors, which, despite representing a possible danger to democracy and human rationality, were now also extremely widespread on the Scandinavian peninsula.

On the subject, we can turn again on Ranulf's minor writings. In particular, we can refer to a small work by Ranulf in which we are given some important clues about social democracy. The occasion is a review of a volume on the history of social democracy in Sweden<sup>27</sup>. Incidentally to the above review, however, Ranulf does not fail to note that a similar volume is also needed on the history of Danish social democracy, in order to fully understand its nature and historical changes. From the point of view of his hard-boiled positivism, such a volume would represent a test case for the Swedish social democratic model. At the end of the contribution, Ranulf argues that it is certainly useful to have works on each party, not just on the social democrats, but only a study on the same party, done with «scientific objectivity» can individuate a higher pattern, and there would be «nothing more useful in contemporary Danish society»<sup>28</sup>. We have now to understand what Ranulf really meant by this.

## 5. RANULF ON PROPAGANDA AND THE “OTHER” GEMEINSCHAFT

As the above-mentioned contributions suggest, Ranulf gradually began to study the relationship between society and politics. After World War II, his aim was to equip scientific and social debate with intellectual tools against the horrors of war. Already in an early paper in 1936, Ranulf had theorized a new field of study related to propaganda<sup>29</sup>, stating that the function of propaganda is to foment and increase moral indignation. Ranulf focused his research especially on war propaganda, writing contributions on both National Socialism and the resistance movement. The only thing commonly remember about his studies is the statement that the Nazis and the resistance fighters used the same communicative violence. Clearly, however, Ranulf main goal was not to deny the value of Resistance, but to affirm a scientific methodology for propaganda<sup>30</sup>, based on the study of moral indignation and on a scientific counterpropaganda, to be taught in schools<sup>31</sup>. Scientific propaganda cannot merely appeal to the same moral in-

<sup>27</sup> S. Ranulf, *En bog som burde skrives*, in «Nationaløkonomisk Tidsskrift», n. 80, pp. 50-59, in which the two-volume *Den svenska socialdemokratiens* (1941) by H. Tingsten is reviewed.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> S. Ranulf, *Propaganda*, cit., pp. 239-256.

<sup>30</sup> On this issue we can rely again on D.N. Smith, *Collectivism and intellectuals ecc.*, cit., p. 317ff.

<sup>31</sup> See S. Ranulf, *Propaganda*, cit., p. 255 and *Hitlers Kampf gegen die Objektivität*, Acta Jutlandica, København, Ejnar Munksgaard 1946, p. 117.

dignation targeted by common propaganda, because we would never be able to foresee its effects, so to divert its influence with sufficient certainty. Rather, the use of moral indignation should be accompanied by a new subject that would study propaganda, debunking its obvious shortcomings. Although this does not dispel any doubts about the methodology used, Ranulf's objections appear to be epistemological and not ethical, as he himself makes clear<sup>32</sup>. Now that we have clarified this point, we must return to the question with which we started: how the writings on propaganda can help us understand Ranulf's positivistic and ethos-oriented sociology. In his 1936 paper, Ranulf noted that the Nazi's propaganda-machine was extremely effective in Germany, but it did not have the desired results in Denmark:

Since 1933, there have been, also in Denmark, a number of scattered attempts to carry out horror-propaganda based on the Nazi model. Most of these attempts were abandoned relatively quickly, probably because it turned out that the audience did not respond to the intention. The crisis here has not been serious enough, the insecurity not great enough, the reactivity not high enough for such a propaganda to succeed<sup>33</sup>.

In light of what we have observed, the formulation of this paragraph all together and the use of the ambiguous term «reactivity» appears now to hold together Danish contingent situation before World War II and Danish cultural identity. Moreover, if we look at the history of cultural relations between Germany and Denmark, we will find traces of a real cultural clash. A plethora of examples can be offered regarding this question. We might think, for example, at the instructions given to German officers, in a pamphlet dated 9 April 1940, the day of the Nazi occupation of Denmark. In these instructions, the German soldiers are informed of the Danish «distinguishing characteristics» in order to limit confrontations. It is said that Danes think «economically» (*wirtschaftlich*) since their interests revolve mainly around matters of material life, and that they cannot understand the aims of National Socialist Germany<sup>34</sup>. In general, Nazi tended to consider the Danes as people who are more inclined to take interest in the production and consumption of material goods than in the production and enjoyment of a higher spiritual life, as testified by the recurrent German ethnophaulism “*Speckdänen*”<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> See S. Ranulf, *On the Survival Chances of Democracy*, cit., p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> S. Ranulf, *Propaganda*, cit. p. 246 (tr. mine).

<sup>34</sup> The *Tysk soldaterinstruks om danskernes mentalitet, 9. april 1940*, can be accessed at the following link: <<https://danmarkshistorien.dk/vis/materiale/tysk-soldaterinstruks-om-danskernes-mentalitet-9-april-1940/>>

<sup>35</sup> This derogatory term initially referred to the Danish minority in South Schleswig, the northernmost German region bordering Denmark. The Danish were accused of claiming Scandinavian ancestry purely on the basis of the supplies that Denmark sent as aid during the war, i.e. purely on

To understand, instead, what Danes thought of Germans we can look at the 1935 speech by the philologist and rector of Copenhagen University J. Østrup (1867-1938). Being aware of the Nazi propaganda about the so-called Nordic race, Østrup clearly stated, while receiving the ovation of the almost 1500 students present, that the Nazi did not comprehend Nordic “mentality”:

it is a fact, that the Vikings never felt themselves a will-less mass, but always a commonwealth of free men. That is the Nordic spirit. Russia and Germany are now in absolute opposition to the Nordic ideal of society; for they both have reduced man to a mere cog in the state machinery, suppressing all personal freedom<sup>36</sup>.

In short, Germans desired to get closer to the Nordic tradition, but they could not grasp the peculiarities of Danish culture. This was certainly due to the Nazi imperialist delirium, but not only. In this cultural disagreement we should spot certain “cultural traits”<sup>37</sup>, which somehow revive Ranulf’s predilection for the *Gesellschaft* and its distrust for *Gemeinschaft*, while reemerging in the aforementioned “poor” Danish receptivity. In this sense, the moral indignation model remains cogent, but as far as propaganda is concerned, each ethos seems to experience a different level of agitation. That being the case, we should now understand why the old Ranulf seems to change his mind about *Gemeinschaft* while studying propaganda.

We are referring here to a chapter of the text *On the survival chance of democracy*<sup>38</sup> (1948). Here Ranulf confronts two works which tried to shed new light on the notion of *Gemeinschaft*<sup>39</sup>. From these works it was indeed possible to in-

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the basis of a material calculation, and for this reason the Danes in this region were called *Speckdänen* or *die dummen Dänen*. Very soon this term was extended to the entire Danish population, becoming organic to the national-socialist lexicon, especially in the conflicts between the German and Danish communities in Schleswig. On this matter see, at least, J.H. Schjørring, *Der nationale Grundtvig und seine Wirkungsgeschichte. Anmerkungen zur Geschichte des Nachbarverhältnisses zwischen Deutschland und Dänemark*, in «Grundtvig studier», n. 50 (1), 1999, p. 173-194; U. Danker and A. Schwabe, *Schleswig-Holstein und der Nationalsozialismus*, Wachholtz, Kiel, 2005 and J. Kühl (ed.) *Ein europäisches Modell? Nationale Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzland 1945-2005*, Münster, Vrg, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in J. Joesten, *The Nazis in Scandinavia*, in «Foreign Affairs» 15 (4), 1937, pp. 721-722. On this matter, see, at least, J. Lund, *Collaboration in Print: the 'Aktion Ritterbusch' and the failure of German intellectual propaganda in occupied Denmark, 1940-1942*, in «Scandinavian Journal of History», n. 37 (3), 2012, pp. 329-354.

<sup>37</sup> See, at least, L. Yahil, *National pride and defeat: A comparison of Danish and German nationalism*, in «Journal of Contemporary History», n. 26 (4), 1991, pp. 453-478; U. Østergård, *The Danish path to modernity*, in «Thesis Eleven» 77, 2004, pp. 25-43 and *Danish national identity: an historical account*, in *Global Collaboration: Intercultural Experiences and Learning*, ed. by M.C. Gertsen, A-M. Søderberg, M. Zølner, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, pp. 37-58.

<sup>38</sup> S. Ranulf, *On the survival chances of democracy*, cit.

<sup>39</sup> The works presented are *From Democracy to Nazism*, 1945 by Rudolf Heberle and *The War Against the West* (1938) by Aurel Kolnai.

fer at least three different ideas of *Gemeinschaft*. One author compared a *Gemeinschaft* originated in some pietistic communities of Schleswig Holstein, which portrayed anti-war, anti-imperialistic, humanitarian and solidaristic values, and a local “neo-romantic” *Gemeinschaft*, which yearned for a charismatic leader and a violent redemption. The other author presented a third kind of *Gemeinschaft*, known as *Bund*, in which young people abandoned their homes and built a group of individuals who swore mutual aid, following the example of legendary warriors<sup>40</sup>. Each of these three ideas could be considered somewhat «inspired by Tönnies», but it is easy to see how Ranulf had always reduced *Gemeinschaft* to the “neo-romantic” one. The arguments presented seem now to convince Ranulf, and he is pushed to retreat his opinion on the *Gesellschaft*. According to Ranulf, the rational intransigence of neoliberalism exposes a blowback towards an authoritarian state, when confronted with an unforeseen possibility: a “positive” form of *Gemeinschaft*. In light of this awareness, Ranulf finally exclaims that «the Social Democrats may, after all, have been well advised in [...] adopting the views of Tönnies»<sup>41</sup>.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Such an admission can be seen as the ultimate contradiction of a misplaced free-market liberal<sup>42</sup>. Nevertheless, in our judgment, this change of perspective in the old Ranulf marks an advance. From an epistemological point of view the concept of *Gemeinschaft* remains shady, but it also seems capable of guaranteeing peace and stability, whereas the *Gesellschaft* is epistemologically fallacious, because it is not sensitive to ethos-related differences, thus being unable to recognise the positive aspects of the *Gemeinschaft*. As we have said, Ranulf’s sociology dissolves ethos in an operational sense, through the engagement of common knowledge and (folk)-psychology. Nonetheless this element becomes preponderant in the field of propaganda, where the quantitative methodology must meet the social and political needs of democracy. Ranulf now choose the least dangerous perspective, which is a free secularized *Gemeinschaft*-like society, solidaristic, democratic and distant from ideological perspectives. Not surprisingly, Ranulf had already noticed that Scandinavian social democracies were taking a different path from their Marxist roots, in function of a process of secularization that patently exhibited their ethos<sup>43</sup>. The Scandinavian social democrats must «clarify to themselves»

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<sup>40</sup> This concept is somehow close to Østrup (classic) definition of «Nordic mentality». See below.

<sup>41</sup> S. Ranulf, *On the survival chances of Democracy*, cit., p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> D.N. Smith, *Collectivism and intellectuals ecc.*, cit., p. 323.

<sup>43</sup> See S. Ranulf, *En bog som burde skrives*, cit., pp. 57-58.

that they have stopped being Marxist, but also that they have stopped being social democrats in the “German way”, becoming self-aware of their Scandinavian way in social democracy. Ranulf final answer breaks out of his prejudicial view of *Gemeinschaft*, finally reaching a secularized model, which is curiously close to - not to say biased by – the Scandinavian “practical” ethos.